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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 002852

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [COE](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: RUSSIA CONFIDENT AT PACE

REF: A. PARIS 1754  
[1](#)B. MOSCOW 2803

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Alice Wells for reason 1.4  
(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Russian MFA and Duma representatives are confident that a proposal to strip the Russian delegation of its voting rights at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) will fail. However, the MFA has developed a back-up plan to respond "tactically" to developments. The MFA impressed upon us that the Russian public was unhappy funding an organization that was used to condemn Russian actions, but Russia would continue to support Council of Europe (CoE) activities and commitments. The GOR is equally confident that a PACE delegation that visited Moscow September 22-23 to investigate the war in Georgia will produce a balanced report for PACE deliberations on September 29, with van den Brande reportedly agreeing to visit Tskhinvali twice -- one time via Vladikavkaz. Russian protestations aside, the GOR still takes pride in its 2006 CoE chairmanship, with liberal Russian legislators viewing the organization as a useful foil. End summary.

#### Russian Representation to PACE

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[1](#)2. (C) Alexander Kurmaz, Head of the CoE Division of the European Cooperation Department, told us September 23 that Russia will respond "tactically" to attempts to strip its PACE delegation of voting rights. He was confident that the proposal would not go forward, but he did outline four options depending on events in Strasbourg:

- A competing proposal by a friendly delegation to suspend the Georgian delegation's right to vote;
- Withdrawal of the Russian delegation from PACE and denouncing the proceedings;
- Suspension, reduction, or elimination of the Russian financial contribution to the CoE; and
- Complete Russian withdrawal from the CoE.

[1](#)3. (SBU) While Kurmaz had clearly developed an alternate strategy should events proceed against Russia at the parliament next week, State Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov struck a more confident note to the press. He told ITAR-TASS on September 23 "Let us wait and see what the situation will be like next week. I am sure that most members will not agree with suspending Russia's powers."

#### Ongoing Russian Concerns

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[1](#)4. (C) The tension leading up to next week's deliberations at PACE brought to the fore ongoing Russian issues with the CoE. Kurmaz claimed to have "a stack of letters 20 centimeters thick" requesting Russia to withdraw from the organization. "We contribute 30 million USD per year" to the CoE; public opinion would rather have that money spent on bread than to support critics using PACE and the CoE to "denounce Russia." He pointed to Estonian and Polish members of the CoE as

particularly aggressive in attempting to use the parliamentary assembly as an anti-Russian platform. Kurmaz labeled efforts by some members to "reevaluate history" and accuse the USSR of crimes were "a dramatic and systematic threat to our participation." He charged that some countries would not be satisfied until Russia was disassembled. While denouncing members of "new" Europe and noting U.S. vocal criticism at the September 11 meeting of the COM, he nonetheless welcomed U.S. participation as observers at the CoE because the U.S. sought to work "constructively" (Ref A).

For now, he said Russia would continue to participate in CoE activities, including visits by the Anti-Torture Committee and the upcoming visit of Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg to Georgia and South Ossetia.

PACE Delegation Visit Sept 22-23  
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15. (C) Turning to the September 22-23 visit of the PACE Delegation to Russia, South Ossetia, and Georgia headed by Luc van den Brande to evaluate the recent conflict, Kurmaz reported that in Moscow the delegation met with Duma Speaker Gryzlov, the Chair of the Duma International Affairs Committee Konstantin Kosachev, and with Deputy Chief of the General Staff Anatoly Nogovitsyn. Kurmaz was optimistic that the delegation would deliver a balanced report. He claimed that the MFA had prevailed upon the delegation to change their travel itinerary -- the delegation would now visit Tshkinvali twice, once through Vladikavkaz without substantive meetings and once from Tbilisi. "Only this way can the delegation receive a balanced perspective." (Note: Post has not yet confirmed that this change of routing

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occurred. End note.) Chairman Kosachev told reporters September 23 that the majority of the PACE delegation had no prejudices and would "sincerely seek to scrutinize" events. Interfax summarized van den Brande to say at a news conference September 23 that "both parties violated human rights" in the recent conflict in Georgia, although he did not specify who the parties were.

Comment  
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16. (C) Despite Kurmaz's posturing, Russia would withdraw from the CoE only as a last resort. While hurt by regular condemnations at PACE, especially on its human rights record, the MFA still discusses with pride its 2006 chairmanship at the CoE. Federation Council Chairman Mikhail Margelov recently pointed out (Ref B), while arguing Russians care little about the good opinion of the CoE, the disenfranchisement of Russia at PACE would punish the most liberal group of Russian legislators.  
BEYRLE